

Democrat Henry Waxman to retire after 40 years

Catalina Camia, USA TODAY [\(/staff/1778/catalina-camia\)](#) 1:56 p.m. EST January 30, 2014

California lawmaker was one of the most activist legislators in Congress, whose work affected federal policies on health care, energy and the environment.



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WASHINGTON – Rep. Henry Waxman of California, a liberal power broker for 40 years and a top ally of Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi, said Thursday he will retire at the end of this term.

Waxman, 74, was first elected in 1974 as part of the post-Watergate class of Democratic reformers.

"Today, I am announcing that I have run my last campaign," he said in a statement. "I still feel youthful and energetic, but I recognize if I want to experience a life outside of Congress, I need to start soon."

Waxman's career began just after Richard Nixon's demise and spanned seven presidencies. He exercised outsized influence over federal policies affecting the air Americans breathe, the water they drink, the food they eat, the prescription drugs they take and the medical care they receive.

The Democrat can count among his achievements funding for AIDS research, tougher pollution controls, and greater scrutiny of tobacco companies and the use of steroids in professional baseball. He helped craft and pass the Affordable Care Act, the national health care law. Waxman also promoted rights for women, minorities and gays and lesbians, and was an ardent defender of Israel.

For years, Waxman headed a powerful health subcommittee with primary jurisdiction over Medicaid, the federal-state health care program for low-income people. There, he regularly fought and won battles to expand the program to more women, children and people with disabilities.

When Democrats were in the House minority in the 1990s, Waxman used his perch on the Government Reform Committee to beat back GOP-led investigations of Bill Clinton and became one of the Democratic president's staunchest defenders on Capitol Hill.

In his lengthy statement, Waxman alluded to the partisanship that permeates much of Congress and the "extremism of the Tea Party Republicans." The lawmaker said he is "embarrassed that the greatest legislative body in the world too often operates in a partisan intellectual vacuum, denying science, refusing to listen to experts and ignoring the facts."

But Waxman insisted that he was not leaving out of frustration or fear that House Democrats cannot reclaim the majority. Simply, he said, "it's time for someone else to have the chance to make his or her mark."

The retirements of Waxman and Rep. George Miller, another Californian with close ties to Pelosi, leaves Democrats without two of the most activist and prolific legislators who have served on their side of the aisle. Waxman is now the seventh House Democrat to announce his retirement after the 2014 elections, according to a list compiled by *Roll Call*.

Pelosi said Waxman "has been synonymous with responsible action, extraordinary legislative skill, passionate public service and bold leadership on behalf of Los Angeles, California and the American people."

"The list of Henry Waxman's achievements could go on and on," she said. "It has been a true privilege to call him colleague and a distinct honor to know him as a friend."

Waxman's 33rd Congressional District, which covers parts of Los Angeles, Santa Monica and Beverly Hills, is a Democratic stronghold. President Obama won 61% of the vote there in the 2012 elections.

Contributing: Richard Wolf

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